Operation NELA: Leadership Lessons Response

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Utilizing the readings, Tipping Point Leadership and The Bell Curve:

1. What themes/learning points emerged?

*Tipping Point Leadership*: Creating change that matters requires the energy of the masses. One person alone cannot make change happen. All members of an organization must be on board to bring about change. Employees need to want the change. Get key influencers on board as they can create the most momentum. Know the players and know who has the power in an organization to create change. A leader puts the right people in the right places. Looking at data matters. No longer can we ignore what the numbers say. More money is not the solution but strategic use of resources is key. Data should drive policies. The vision the leader sets should be framed so others believe that results are attainable. Lead by example. Engage the community.

*The Bell Curve*: Expect more than the status quo. Always strive for more than the best. Evidence-based practice should guide what we do. Planning together is great practice. Let data guide our practice. Refuse average.

1. What are your take-away or gold nuggets?

One person alone cannot make change happen. It all starts with a vision and getting people on board to leverage that change. My dad told me when I was discouraged in college about my less than perfect grades that a doctor who graduated with a B was still a doctor. What I found interesting in the Bell Curve article is that I should never accept a B. That means I’m average. I want to be a principal who is above average because the stakes are high. Children’s lives are at stake.

What can school leaders learn from these top fliers?

First, school leaders need to know the staff at their schools. Know their strengths and weaknesses. Know whom you can get on board with the vision. Provide honest feedback to staff because the stakes are high.

Second, understand the value of data. Let that data drive instruction. Working together as teams, using research-based strategies provides honest feedback and can leverage change. Don’t allow teachers to accept average work. We need to be intentional in our efforts. If children are not learning, we need to change what we are doing. Doing the same thing, day after day, without making adjustments is futile.

1. If you were to replace the word “doctors” (in Bell Curve) or “Police Chief” (in tipping point) with the word “teachers” or “educators”, what would that mean? What would that look like in practice?

In the Tipping Point article, the authors, Kim and Mauborgne, suggest that Bratton, the police chief, was an example of tipping point leadership. Tipping Point leadership “hinges on the insight that in any organization, once the beliefs and energies of the critical mass of people are engage, conversion to a new idea will spread like an epidemic, bringing about fundamental change very quickly” (p. 62). In schools, we have teachers who continue to do what they have always done, no matter if it is effective or not. Trying to change their ideas to a new way of thinking may be very difficult. We don’t have time to waste. So how can schools follow this model to bring about this fundamental change quickly? The tipping point leadership theory suggest this happens through great leaders (principals) who “concentrate their resources on what really matters, who mobilize the commitment of the organization’s key players, and who silence the most vocal naysayers” (p. 62). Relating this to schools, it is the leaders role to know what the resources are and focus what we have where the greatest change can occur. Having relationships with key players to get them on board will help leverage this change. In every school, there are negative teachers who will be the naysayers. I know of one in my school. She can sway most teachers to her way of thinking. School leaders need to spend energy with these powerful teachers or refocus their attention to silence them.

As I reflect on the Bell Curve article, I would argue that there is always room for growth. There is always more we can do. We blame the lack of student progress on homes, poverty, and God given talent. What if we stop blaming the students and strive for more?

1. What parallels exist between these two articles and the 90/90/90 article?

Just because children are poor and perform poorly does not mean that we stop pushing for more. If these students are not learning, we need leverage change. Money is not the cure. All of these articles led me to believe that more funding is not the answer. Being purposeful, using data, providing opportunities for teachers to plan and figure out what is not working can effect great change. I guess an aha moment for me this year is “Vision”. I know we heard so much last semester on “vision” which scared me so I ignored it. All I have read leads me back to setting a vision and getting all stakeholders to have the same vision. We all have to work together and not accept mediocre.